

HIT, ROBERT ROBERTS

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Robert Roberts Hitt

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CONGRESSMAN HITT DEAD

Chairman Of Foreign Affairs Committee Passes Away.

HE WAS A FRIEND OF LINCOLN

Intimate, Too, With Many Another National Character—He Had A Long And Varied Career.

[Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun.]
Narragansett Pier, R. I., Sept. 20.—Congressman Robert Roberts Hitt, of Mount Morris, Ill., chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and a candidate for the Vice-Presidential nomination on the Roosevelt ticket in 1904, died today at Kinney Lodge, his summer home here, aged 72 years.

Heart failure, following a long period of increasing physical weakness, was the cause of death. Mrs. Hitt and her two sons, W. S. Hitt and R. H. Hitt, were at the bedside of the Congressman when he died.

When Mr. Hitt, accompanied by his wife, arrived at Kinney Lodge, in June, it was understood that he was not in good health, his condition being attributed to ailments due to advanced years. For some time the patient showed improvement, but a few weeks ago most serious symptoms were noted. Subsequent treatment seemed to have little beneficial effect, although the advice of a specialist constantly was sought.

There was no alarming sudden change, and up to early today immediate death was not expected. A collapse, due to heart weakness, came during the morning hours with fatal result.

Arrangements will be made to remove the body to Illinois tomorrow.

Not Unexpected In Washington.

Washington, Sept. 20.—Ill health, continuing through two years at least, which for the most part unfitted him for his Congressional duties, had afflicted Representative Hitt so that his demise was not altogether unexpected here. In fact, the greater part of the work of the important Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House, of which Mr. Hitt was chairman, was during the entire last session of Congress discharged, first by Representative Robert Adams, of Pennsylvania, up to the time of his tragic death last spring, and afterward by Representatives Cousins, of Iowa; Charles Landis, of Indiana, and Perkins, of New York.

Mr. Hitt was one of the most popular men in Congress, his friendships including men of all parties, and because of his wide experience and ability he was always listened to with the greatest of attention when he dealt with matters pertaining to the foreign service.

He Had A Varied Career.

The career of Representative Hitt was a varied one, embracing newspaper work, diplomacy and legislation. As a young man, he was closely associated with Abraham Lincoln and was a friend of Grant, Garfield, Blaine, Reed and McKinley. He was one of the few remaining statesmen in public life who might be said to link the Republican party of 50 years ago with the Republican party of today—the day of its birth with the day of its maturity, the Republican party of Lincoln with the Republican party of Roosevelt.

Mr. Hitt was born at Urbana, Ill., Jan. 18, 1834. When he was 3 years old his parents removed to Ogle county, Illinois, and it was in this part of the State, only a short distance from the old homestead, that Mr. Hitt ever since had his home. He was educated at Rock River Seminary, now Mount Morris College, and at De Pauw University, at Asbury, Ill.

While in the seminary he became interested in stenography, and, as with everything else he undertook, he became master of it. His success in life was due in no small measure to this fact.

In those days shorthand writers were by no means so common as they are now. About that time he had an ambition to become a journalist, and almost his first employment was on the staff of the Chicago Tribune. When it was learned that he was a stenographer he received what was regarded as the star assignment on the paper—to report the great debates between Douglas and Lincoln in 1858, when the "Little Giant" and the "Rail-Splitter" were rival candidates for the Senate and canvassed the State in joint debate in a campaign which has ever been memorable in the political history of Illinois.

Knew Douglas And Lincoln.

In this way Mr. Hitt came to be known to both Douglas and Lincoln. His reports of the debates were used by both political parties and form the only record that exists of those vigorous speeches.

It is many years since Mr. Hitt did any shorthand reporting, but his hand never lost its cunning, and until recently he not infrequently jotted down for a memorandum those peculiar little hooks and quirks which mean so much to the stenographer. If occasion required he could do a job of shorthand reporting which would put to shame many an amanuensis.

Mr. Hitt became the friend of President Grant, and in 1874 was made First Secretary of the United States Legation in Paris. During the absence of the American Minister he was charge d'affaires. He seemed to have a natural ability and taste for diplomatic matters, and had he remained in that branch of the service there is no doubt that he would have become one of America's greatest diplomatists.

In 1881 he returned to the United States and was made First Assistant Secretary of State under James G. Blaine, who had discovered his caliber and how well suited he was for dealing with the affairs of state. His career in the State Department was cut short by the death of Representative R. M. A. Hawk, whom he was nominated to succeed.

A Fixture In Congress

The Republicans of the district had a controversy over the nomination, there being several candidates and an inability to agree upon any of them. Finally, someone suggested Mr. Hitt. To the question "Who's Hitt?" the response was made that he was the man whom James G. Blaine thought well enough of to make Assistant Secretary of State. That settled the matter, and Mr. Hitt was nominated and elected in November, 1882.

Since that time his record won him, every other year, a re-nomination without opposition and an election by a large majority.

In the Fifty-sixth Congress Mr. Hitt was chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, a position for which his experience and his ability to grasp international questions especially fitted him. Had he been more of a politician he might have been a Senator long ago.

He was a consistent advocate of improvement in the diplomatic and consular service, and much that has been accomplished in that direction has been due to his ef-

orts. In dealing with international problems his advice was always sought and followed by the leaders of his party. While an advocate of Chinese exclusion, Mr. Hitt insisted that the exclusion of the Chinese should be in accordance with existing treaties with the Chinese Empire and never in violation of international obligations.

Averted Trouble With Mexico.

It was largely through his efforts in July, 1886, that trouble with the Republic of Mexico was averted. A. K. Cutting, an American citizen, had upon crossing the border at El Paso into Mexico been arrested and thrown into prison for having published in Texas an article which was regarded by Mexicans as slanderous and libelous upon their country. The Mexicans promulgated the doctrine of exterritoriality, assuming that their Government had the right to punish a person for an offense against its laws or its citizens when he should be arrested upon Mexican soil, regardless of the fact that the alleged offense was committed outside of the jurisdiction of Mexico.

Mexico refused for a time to surrender Cutting and serious difficulties were threatened. A speech by Mr. Hitt in the House had the effect of preventing hasty action and the matter was satisfactorily adjusted.

Mr. Hitt was a member of the World's Fair Committee and as such did much toward selecting Chicago as the place for holding the Columbian Exposition. He was appointed in 1898 by the late President McKinley as one of the committee to provide for the establishment of a government for Hawaii, and as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs he led the fight in the House for the resolution providing for the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands.

Wanted A Commercial Union.

Mr. Hitt's loyalty to protection was never doubted; he, however, advocated reciprocity. He went a step beyond urging reciprocity with Canada and advocated a commercial union with Canada by which all tariff duties between this country and the Dominion should be abolished and the Canadians be as free to buy and sell in the markets of the United States as the people of one State are free to buy and sell in another State, and as the people of the States would be to buy and sell in Canada; in fact, such a commercial union between this Government and Canada as would provide for free trade between the two countries with protection against the rest of the world.

In March, 1883, Mr. Hitt introduced in the House a resolution embodying his views and authorizing the appointment by the President of a commission to prepare such a scheme whenever Canada might announce her desire for it.

In March, 1889, Mr. Hitt was successful in having his resolution passed by the House of Representatives, which was then Democratic.

Mr. Hitt made a strong speech in defense of the President's Panama policy.

Prominent In Social Life.

During their 22 years of residence in Washington the Hitts had always been foremost in the society of the capital. Mrs. Hitt, who was Miss Reynolds, of Indianapolis, is not only wealthy, but ranks as one of the most beautiful and brilliant women of Washington.

Their home had always been a center for wit, wisdom and fashion. Mrs. Hitt's social career after her marriage began in Paris, when her husband was the Charge d'Affaires of the United States Legation in that city. It was transferred to Washington during the time Mr. Hitt was First Assistant Secretary of State, and her popularity grew during the many years Mr. Hitt has represented an Illinois constituency in the House.

His position for many years at the head of the Committee on Foreign Affairs alone gave the Hitts prominence in the diplomatic circle, but their list was by no means confined to one class. Their home at 1509 K street offered the nearest approach to a salon of anything in Washington.

The house was for a time the residence of William M. Evarts, Secretary of State under Mr. Hayes. It is surrounded by a spacious lawn and is well designed and furnished for social functions.

